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Review of progress in forests since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development*

Report of the Secretary-General

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* The present report was prepared by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations as task manager for chapter 11 of Agenda 21, with contributions from member organizations of the informal high-level Inter-Agency Task Force on Forests (ITFF), other United Nations agencies and international organizations. The report is a brief factual overview, which intends to inform the Commission on Sustainable Development on key developments in the subject area.

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Introduction

1. Forests were among the most controversial issues negotiated at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. Several years of international attention focusing largely on tropical deforestation had created a situation in which developing countries, in particular forest-rich tropical countries, felt that their sovereignty over their natural resources was threatened. This North-South polarization, thus, did not permit agreement beyond the Non-legally Binding Authoritative Statement of Principles for a Global Consensus on the Management, Conservation and Sustainable Development of All Types of Forests ("Forest Principles")[1] and chapter 11 of Agenda 21,[2] at the time of the Conference.

2. The post-United Nations Conference on Environment and Development process contributed substantially to the current high level of global awareness of issues connected with sustainable forest management. A three-year period of confidence-building after the Conference was followed by the establishment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) in 1995, then by the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF) in 1997: both were established under the Commission on Sustainable Development to further deliberate and build consensus in the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests. This five-year ad hoc process culminated in October 2000, when the Economic and Social Council established a new international arrangement on forests, the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), and invited the executive heads of relevant organizations of the United Nations system and heads of other relevant international and regional organizations, institutions and instruments to form a collaborative partnership on forests (Council resolution 2000/35 of 18 October 2000).

3. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development process contributed substantially to the current high level of global awareness of issues connected with sustainable forest management. IPF and IFF both:

- Were open and inclusive intergovernmental forums in which non-government representatives from environmental organizations, including indigenous people's organizations, and forest industry were able to participate;
- Advanced common understanding of sustainable forest management;
- Promoted North-South partnerships between Governments;
- Contributed to the departure from the traditional focus on sustaining wood supply to considering the management of forests in an integrated and holistic manner;
- Were facilitated through enhanced coordination among United Nations and other forest-related international organizations, in particular the informal, high-level Inter-Agency Task Force on Forests (ITFF).

4. The present report describes the progress made, challenges faced and main trends since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in the four programme areas of chapter 11 of Agenda 21.

I. Assessment of achievements and constraints

A. Sustaining multiple roles of forests and institutional strengthening

5. Some of the most significant accomplishments have been in this programme area. The area of managed forests is increasing. Recent figures (Forest Resources Assessment 2000) indicate that 88 per cent of the forests of developed countries are managed under a formal or informal plan. Statistics are not available for all developing countries, but preliminary results show that at least 117 million hectares (or 5.8 per cent of the total forest area) are covered by a formal forest management plan of five or more years.

6. Criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management have been developed and widely adopted, providing a framework for monitoring and reporting on progress and guiding policy and management decisions. Following the pioneering work of the International Tropic Timber Organization (ITTO) before the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in this area, nine major international criteria and indicators processes have been launched involving nearly 150 countries, and there is a widespread interest in, and support for, the work of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United

Nations (FAO), ITTO, the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), the International Union of Forestry Research Organizations (IUFRO) and other partners. More recent criteria and indicators have been developed by most processes for use at the local forest management unit level. Further work on criteria and indicators is needed in a number of critical areas including:

- Capacity-building to assist countries in implementing criteria and indicators;
- Further encouragement of countries to participate in any process;
- Common international understanding of key concepts, terms and definitions;
- Further clarification of interrelationships between criteria and indicators and certification;
- Further development of criteria and indicators based on the scientific soundness, technical relevance and economic feasibility of key indicators.

7. National forest programmes broadly encompass the full range of policies, institutions, plans and programmes to manage, utilize, protect and enhance forest resources within a country. The strength of the concept is related to the political commitment generated and the flexibility of the approach, which allows each country to adjust its forest programme to national conditions and development priorities. A survey of 145 countries undertaken by FAO in 1998-1999 showed that 96 per cent of them had national forest programmes in various stages of development but such programmes were being implemented only in 44 per cent of the countries, and many were "stalled" owing to lack of institutional, human resource and financial capacity as well as the absence of adequate policies, poor coordination and deficient mechanisms for public participation.

8. The IPF/IFF process encouraged greater openness to public, or major group, participation both in national and in international forums, enriching the debate and making the resulting outcomes more robust. Also, more countries and regions are involved in the international forest policy deliberations than a decade ago owing to various regional activities, such as criteria and indicators processes, the regional preparatory meetings of the non-governmental organizations-Costa Rica-United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) initiative on the underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation (see E/CN.17/IFF/1999/18), the regional consultations of the Costa Rica-Canada initiative on the international arrangements and mechanisms on forests (see E/CN.17/IFF/2000/9), and the regional activities of many other organizations.

9. The implementation of IPF/IFF proposals for action will require countries to continue efforts towards public participation; devolve responsibilities for forest management; improve links between forest policy and ground-level implementation; and incorporate the experience of local forest users and the public in policy formulation.

10. There also remain challenges to the implementation of cross-sectoral coordination and political commitment at the national level towards sustainable forest management policies and practices and the introduction of good governance in relation to forest management.

B. Forest conservation and rehabilitation

11. Forest conservation and rehabilitation, and maintaining forest cover to meet present and future needs, have been overriding principles of the intergovernmental forest policy dialogue during the last decade. In this respect, finding innovative solutions to the loss of forest cover and forest degradation is a major challenge, owing to many fundamental socio-economic factors, such as land ownership and distribution, population growth and poverty, which are beyond the forest sector's influence. Both IPF and IFF emphasized the need for coordinated actions with related chapters of Agenda 21, the Convention on Biological Diversity,[3] the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa,[4] and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.[5]

12. Some progress has been made in policies developed to combat the loss of forest cover caused by the conversion of forests to agricultural use and to combat the many causes of forest degradation. Forest fires have been a major cause of forest destruction and degradation in recent years.

13. The area of planted forests has continued to increase. In 2000, the global area of forest plantations was estimated at 186 million hectares, or 4.8 per cent

of the estimated global forest area (4.1 per cent in 1995). Planted forests are increasingly supplying industrial roundwood and fuelwood, providing perhaps 20 per cent of global industrial roundwood. Successful plantation development is highly dependent on a favourable policy and investment climate coupled with sound techniques and stakeholder involvement.

14. Efforts to conserve forest biological diversity have become widespread. The Convention on Biological Diversity provides an international legal framework for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and many countries have prepared national biodiversity action plans. Biodiversity conservation is an important component of bilateral and multilateral assistance and is the focus of concerted efforts by many non-governmental organizations. IFF addressed the topic through special studies and government-sponsored inter-sessional meetings, such as the Brazil-United States of America International Experts Meeting on Protected Forest Areas (1999). It has been estimated by the World Conservation Monitoring Centre within Forest Resources Assessment 2000 that globally the proportion of the world's forests within protected areas has increased from 8 to 11 per cent. While this is a large area, it is still generally not considered to be sufficient. To enhance their conservation value, efforts are being made to increase the area of land in protected area systems and to make more strategic choices about additional areas to protect. Emphasis has been placed on improving the effectiveness of biological diversity conservation within and outside existing protected areas, and managing the two in an integrated way. Managed production forests, incorporating in their objectives the conservation of genetic resources and intraspecific variation in socio-economically important species, are a necessary complement to management for conservation in protected areas.

15. The IPF/IFF process recognized that developing countries with low forest cover and small island developing states have specific needs in sustainable forest management. As a result of the Open-ended International Meeting of Experts on the Special Needs and Requirements of Developing Countries with Low Forest Cover and Unique Types of Forests, hosted by the Islamic Republic of Iran (1999) (see E/CN.17/IFF/2000/7), agreement was reached to launch the Tehran Process to address common issues and raise the low forest cover issues in the international forest policy agenda. Small island developing States, as recognized by Agenda 21, constitute a special case for both environmental protection and development. Particular requirements of small island developing States were examined by the Special Conference at Ministerial Level for Small Island Developing States, organized by FAO in 1999, which proposed a plan of action to promote rehabilitation and conservation of forests and watersheds and ensure sustainable forest management.

C. Utilization, assessment, valuation and research

16. The recent Global Forest Resources Assessment 2000 conducted by FAO has been the most comprehensive assessment in the 50-year history of the Forest Resources Assessment. It included not only the traditional estimates of forest area and deforestation but also many new "sustainability" parameters. Preliminary results from a comparison of remote sensing surveys of forest cover carried out in the 1980s and 1990s show that the rate of deforestation has slowed by 10 per cent in the tropics, particularly the humid tropics, but it is not yet clear if this is statistically significant. The global rate of net forest loss slowed to 9 million hectares yearly, a figure that is 20 per cent lower than the global figure reported in 1995. Forests are disappearing most rapidly in Africa and Latin America, whereas in Asia the reduction of natural forests is largely compensated by new plantation forests. In Europe and North America, the forest area increased.

17. In forest utilization, there have been moves towards more efficient use of raw materials and recycling, particularly in the use of recovered paper: the European paper industry committed its members to increasing the uses of recovered paper from 49 to 57 per cent. Another improvement has been the development of reduced impact logging techniques and codes of harvesting, which are being implemented by the forest industry in some countries of the Asia-Pacific region and elsewhere. The socio-economic contribution of non-wood forest products is better recognized, particularly for major internationally traded products like bamboo, rattan or medicinal plants. More research, in particular on the economics of the entire range of non-wood forest products, is needed.

18. Much of the wood harvested in the world each year is still used for energy production. Of wood harvested in 1995, 63 per cent, or an estimated 7 per cent of the world's total energy supply, was used as wood fuel. In developing countries, however, where fuelwood has been a major source of energy for domestic use, the average share of wood fuels in total energy use remained at 15 per cent. More sustainable sources of supply for meeting fuelwood needs need to be explored.

19. Forest research, traditional forest-related knowledge, monitoring and assessment, and the need for common concepts, terminology and definitions have all been part of the intergovernmental forest agenda since Rio. The Convention on Biological Diversity has included outcomes from the IPF/IFF on traditional forest-related knowledge and indigenous people in its work on implementing article 8 (j) of the Convention and in the implementation of its programme of work for forest biological diversity. There are unresolved issues relating to fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from plant genetic resources as well as to traditional forest-related knowledge and associated intellectual property rights.

20. Work has continued on forest valuation, mostly in academic institutions and at national rather than international level. Efforts have been made to improve the representation of the forestry sector in national income accounts by organizations such as the World Bank, FAO, the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) and the United Nations Statistics Division, as well as national statistical offices. The academic literature on the valuation of non-market costs and benefits of forestry has expanded, but much of this work has had relatively little impact on the day-to-day management of forests or the development of forestry policy. Practical approaches to deal with cost internalization, valuation of forest products and fair and equitable sharing of benefits need to be developed.

21. Continued efforts are needed, particularly by international organizations and conventions. These include:

- Further streamlining and harmonizing of the many reporting formats;
- Further efforts to bring about consensus on sharing of benefits related to traditional forest-related knowledge;
- Funding of forest research; strengthening of capacity-building; fostering of joint research between the public and private sectors; and strengthening of links between forest research and policy-making.

D. Capacity-building, cooperation, technology transfer and trade

22. This programme area, perhaps the most important in the international forest policy agenda, is where there has been least progress. This is partly because the issues extend far beyond the forest sector and the solutions involve Governments and a range of other stakeholders including the private sector.

23. The Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations agreements were seen as important in respect of encouraging sustainable forest management through market incentives, in particular reduction in tariff barriers. The improvements, however, could be overshadowed by export restrictions imposed by developing countries to encourage domestic processing, or by environmental and trade restrictions on products that are perceived as being produced unsustainably.

24. More than 50 international and national schemes for certification of forest management have been developed since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, and the interest in certification is growing, both in developed and in developing countries. Efforts are continuing to make the schemes compatible and to develop a concept for their multilateral recognition. An estimate of the area of certified production forests lies between 2.1 and 2.9 per cent of the total forest area.

25. Illegal logging and illegal trade are increasing problems to sustainable forest management. While logging bans can be an effective way of protecting forests in certain cases, the long-term effects need to be studied.

26. The concept of "trade in support of sustainable forest management" may assist in confining the debate on "trade and environment" in the field of forests. There is need to further examine positive and negative implications of trade in forest products and services for sustainable forest management and ways to minimize/eliminate any negative impacts. Trade in forest products is still mainly limited to primary

products that have little value added from processing in developing countries. Therefore, such trade has led to low local appreciation of the benefits of forests, and fewer job opportunities in processing, and may also have contributed to illegal trade. In relation to technology transfer, two initiatives have arisen from decisions of the Commission on Sustainable Development: the clean technology centres and the database providing information on where to obtain funding for technology transfer, which could be fruitfully pursued by the international community. The Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change[6] has the potential to generate investment in forestry in developing countries through carbon sinks and clean development mechanisms, which need further examination and promotion.

27. Debates over financial cooperation have been difficult in all Agenda 21 sectors. The IPF/IFF process was successful in achieving some specific progress by elaborating on distinct roles of private and public, domestic and external sources of funding in financing sustainable forest management activities. Exploration was begun in respect of the feasibility of an investment promotion entity concept to promote financing for sustainable forest management.

II. Final remarks

28. There have been encouraging trends in the field of forests since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. Global awareness of sustainable forest management concepts in the public and private sectors has increased and political consensus has been reached on many national and international actions on forests. Forests are viewed in a more holistic manner and decisions on forest policy and management are more participatory and more coordinated. The rate of deforestation in tropical forests, especially moist forests, may be decreasing (although it remains high), wood production is increasingly moving to plantations, forest areas in some temperate countries are increasing, and the area of protected forests is increasing.

29. The challenge is to maintain and accelerate the move from policy dialogue to action. UNFF and the collective partnership on forests need to find ways and means to facilitate the implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action, to strengthen political commitment at the national level, and to enhance coordination and cooperation among international organizations, so as to advance common understanding on sustainable forest management and to put it into effect on the ground.

Notes

[1] *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992*, vol. I, *Resolutions Adopted by the Conference* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigendum), resolution 1, annex III.

[2] Ibid., annex II.

[3] See United Nations Environment Programme, *Convention on Biological Diversity* (Environmental law and Institution Programme Activity Centre), June 1992.

[4] A/49/84/Add.2, annex, appendix II.

[5] A/AC.237/18 (Part II)/Add.1 and Corr.1, annex I.

[6] FCCC/CP/1997/7/Add.1, decision 1/CP.3, annex.